



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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February 16, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Former Council Speaker Begay, original drafter of Diné Fundamental Law, supports Council amendments

"I am a bit surprised of the veto." – Edward T. Begay, former Speaker of the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Former Navajo Nation Council Speaker Edward T. Begay supports the amendments to the Diné Fundamental Law adopted by the Navajo Nation Council during the 2010 Winter Session.

Former Speaker Begay listened to the Council debate on the amendments from the gallery of the Navajo Nation Council Chamber and later explained, "The proposed amendments to the legislation sounded like the original position."

Begay was one of the original drafters of the Diné Fundamental Law resolution which was adopted as Resolution CN-69-02 on Nov. 1, 2002. He described the original intent of the Diné Fundamental Law, or Diné bibeehaz'aanii, as preserving and encouraging the education of the young in oral teachings from leaders and the elderly for the benefit of the future of the Diné.

"It is a diverse thing and includes day-to-day life. It gets into songs, prayers and practices," Begay said in explaining that the Diné Fundamental Law should not be used as a tool to be used by one person against another. "The tool is not to punish or to get even with, for lack of a better term, to dominate somebody. It's a teaching tool that you don't hurt people's feelings -- it's a teaching tool."

Begay agreed that, even under the current law, the Diné Fundamental Law should not be used to replace the laws passed by the Navajo Nation Council.

"The court needs to exhaust all remedies before using Navajo common law," Begay said. "That should be part of decisions."

He disagreed with the replacement of codified law with Navajo common law and said, "They forego what they have gone by all these years and they go start to use Navajo common law to make a decision."

Begay agrees with the use of the Diné Fundamental Law in peacemaking and sees the necessity of improvements in the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch's Peacemaking Program.

"Navajo peacemaking court is not fully developed to its potential, meaning that the one hearing the case and rendering a decision, they don't have all the training that sitting judges have," Begay said. "I don't think peacemaking has been fully explored. I guess the Navajo Nation does not fully accept programs. It's almost only on a volunteer basis."

Begay was surprised by President Joe Shirley Jr.'s veto of the Diné Fundamental Law amendments.

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"I am a bit surprised of the veto. I guess that is his option that he exercises," Begay said. "When I listen to the President speak or talk, he always talks about Diné Fundamental Law. For him to veto that is puzzling to me, just looking at the standpoint of the future -- Diné Fundamental Law is a teaching tool."

Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan explained that the veto of Resolution CJA-08-10 was anticipated and advised that veto override legislation has been drafted and that such legislation may be considered in a Navajo Nation Council special session tentatively scheduled for next week.

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